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General debate on national experience in population matters: adolescents and youth

Statement submitted by Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.9/2012/2.

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Statement

In defence of the advancement of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014, and to improve the health and uphold the human rights, including sexual and reproductive rights, of all adolescents, young people and women, the Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer (FEIM) urges Governments:

- **To reaffirm the importance of the implementation of the Programme of Action** as an effective contribution to achieving universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support and realizing sexual and reproductive rights, as basic human rights, for all adolescents and young people, especially adolescent girls, young women and sexual diversity.

- **To empower adolescents and young people, especially adolescent girls and young women, to actively participate and hold leadership roles** in the follow-up to the implementation of the Programme of Action and the key actions for its further implementation (General Assembly resolution S-21/2, annex) and in the planning, implementation and evaluation of policies, programmes and services for helping all people to meet their health and education needs (Programme of Action, paras. 6.15, 8.7; key actions, para. 80); and to establish mechanisms to guarantee their participation, especially of young women in countries of the Global South, in national and international commissions contributing to this process. The planning, budgeting and reporting developed on HIV and sexual and reproductive health at all levels must incorporate sex- and age-disaggregated data on adolescents and young people based on five-year age groups (10-14 years; 15-19 years; 20-24 years).

- **To ensure the delivery of and universal access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services as basic human rights for adolescents and young people (15-24 years old), especially young women and girls as one of the most underserved and vulnerable groups in the population** (Programme of Action, paras. 7.6, 7.16). They must include access to essential commodities without the consent of an adult, including male and female condoms and other prevention methods for unplanned pregnancies and HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, as well as emergency contraception and access to safe abortion where permitted by law (Programme of Action, paras. 7.16, 7.33). These services must be gender-sensitive and evidence- and human rights-based, safeguarding the rights of adolescents and young people to privacy, confidentiality, respect and informed consent (Programme of Action, para. 7.45). This is necessary for young people and adolescents to make healthy and informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and reduce their vulnerability to HIV transmission and early pregnancies (Programme of Action, para. 7.46). In most countries in Latin America legal and social barriers that impede adolescents and young people from accessing these services still exist. In Argentina the majority of sexual and reproductive health services do not provide adolescents and young people with prevention methods and deny them services despite the fact that these are permitted by law. To overcome these obstacles, Governments must work with health-care service providers to remove all legal and social barriers to these services for young people and adolescents (Programme of Action, para. 7.45).

- **To propel the integration of HIV/AIDS into sexual and reproductive health services and comprehensive sexuality education programmes**, ensuring that all health professionals in these services and programmes are sensitive to gender and sexual diversity and have up-to-date training and information about prevention of sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS, diagnosis and treatment in all adolescents, young people and women as well as screening for gender-based violence, and provide appropriate counselling and referrals (Programme of Action, para. 8.31).

- **To guarantee women's, young people's and adolescents' sexual and reproductive rights and improve maternal health**. Women's right to decide for themselves if, when and with whom to have children must be fully upheld (Programme of Action, para. 7.2). They must be guaranteed other essential reproductive health services, including abortion when permitted by law, post-abortion care, provision of prenatal controls, safe delivery and postnatal care, especially for high-risk pregnancies and births to avoid maternal mortality, particularly to adolescent girls (Programme of Action, paras. 7.6, 8.22, 8.23).

- **To scale up resources for strengthening health systems to guarantee universal access to HIV prevention services and commodities to decrease the feminization of HIV/AIDS especially among girls in the 15-24 age group** (Programme of Action, para. 8.33; key actions, para. 95). For example, in Argentina, since 2004, the only age group where infections predominate among females is the 15-24 age group (0.9 male to one female), and it is even higher in the 15-19 age group (0.8 male to one female), yet sexual and reproductive health services still do not provide sufficient male condoms for prevention, and female condoms are not distributed by the Government and are not available at stores. Special emphasis should be placed on scaling up evidence-based prevention practices, including confidential and voluntary counselling and testing for HIV and HPV (human papilloma virus), and access to treatment in all countries (key actions, para. 68).

- **To guarantee the provision of comprehensive sexuality education that addresses HIV transmission and prevention for all female and male adolescents and young people, especially young girls, from a gender and human rights perspective**, to achieve the 95 per cent goal established in the key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action and in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS adopted by the General Assembly in June 2001 (Programme of Action, para. 7.47; key actions, para. 70). Comprehensive sexuality education is absent in most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, even in many of those where it is mandated by law, such as Argentina. Also, before the XVII International AIDS Conference in Mexico in 2008, all the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, represented by their Health and Education Ministers, signed an agreement to implement comprehensive sexuality education, but its implementation has been very slow and faces many obstacles due to opposition from political and religious sectors.

- **To adopt strong national legislation that promotes and protects gender equality and the rights of all people to live free of discrimination, coercion and violence, and includes concrete measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls in general and in the**

HIV response. Violence against women and girls is on the rise worldwide, and is a major violation of women's human rights and a primary impediment to empowerment of young and adolescent women. Forms of gender-based violence particularly affecting adolescent girls and young women, which are fuelled by gender inequalities and require urgent attention for their eradication, include early and forced marriage, sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, and violence witnessed and suffered by children in household environments where domestic violence occurs (Programme of Action, paras. 4.4, 7.35, 7.39, 7.40). Gender discrimination and inequality also result in lack of access to economic, social and educational opportunities for girls, which limits their knowledge and exercise of their sexual and reproductive rights, putting them at greater risk of early pregnancy and HIV infection (Programme of Action, para. 7.42).